

# Head Start: A Moving Target

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In an era of federal retrenchment, it is hard to imagine a vestige of the Great Society that not only has survived, but also thrived. Yet Head Start is just such a program. In the same period in which Aid to Families with Dependent Children, Medicaid, compensatory education, community services, and student loan programs have experienced drastic cutbacks, Head Start not only has been spared the budget cutter's axe, but actually has seen its budget expand.

The popular explanation for the program's longevity is simple—Head Start works, producing, among other benefits, quantifiable gains in social and educational achievement for the children who participate. I agree that Head Start works; its 22-year history demonstrates this conclusively. But my experience as the Deputy Commissioner of the U.S. Administration for Children, Youth and Families [ACYF] has convinced me that the reason for Head Start's continued survival is more complex than its mere successful results. In a time of constrained resources, successful results do not guarantee a program's survival. Head Start has remained vital and has prospered because it is a categorical program that defies categorization.<sup>1</sup>

Rather than restricting itself to the sorts of narrowly defined activities that generally characterize categorical grant programs, Head Start offers a broad range of services and involves multiple target groups. Head Start has been described alternately as a day care service, a form of kindergarten, a community development program, an instrument for job training, a vehicle for the delivery of social and health services, and a kind of compensatory education. Even the basic question of whether the beneficiary of the program is

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1. Categorical grants are grants used only for specific programs or for narrowly defined governmental activities. Block grants, in contrast, are grants given to a governmental unit, usually a state, to be used for a variety of activities within a broad functional area. The Head Start program provides categorical project grants and contracts to public and nonprofit agencies serving preschool children of the poor.

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meant to be the child, the child's family, or the community has never been fully resolved.

As an examination of the history of Head Start shows, the program barely survived its first five years and was deemed a failure by those who initially evaluated it.<sup>2</sup> But the very ambiguity of Head Start's principal mission and constituency<sup>3</sup> has enabled its administrators to recast its image to meet shifts in the prevailing political winds without substantially altering the basic program. It is my opinion that Head Start's multifaceted nature not only has contributed to its success in serving children, families, and communities, but also has provided the program with an initially unanticipated political benefit—the ability to respond to critics of any one component by simply and swiftly drawing their attention to another.

### *I. Head Start Today*

Head Start currently serves 452,000 children—one out of every six eligible low-income children in this country. At least 90% of these children are from families with incomes at or below the poverty level or from families receiving payments from Aid to Families with Dependent Children. Ninety-seven percent of the children served today are between three and five years of age; 83% are three or four years old.

Head Start operates through a nationwide network of 1,305 federal grantees serving some 2,100 economically disadvantaged communities, both urban and rural. It employs approximately 78,000 people in these communities, in addition to an estimated 670,000 volunteers.

Head Start grants are awarded by the Regional Offices of the Department of Health and Human Services and by the Indian and Migrant Program division of Head Start. The awards go directly to grantees, including public agencies, private nonprofit organizations, and school systems that operate Head Start programs at the community level. The federal grant covers 80% of the cost of a local

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2. See Westinghouse Learning Corporation, *The Impact of Head Start: An Evaluation of Head Start's Effect on Children's Cognitive and Affective Development* (1969) [hereinafter Westinghouse Report]. But see Smith & Bissell, *Report Analysis: The Impact of Head Start*, 40 Harv. Educ. Rev. 51 (1970).

3. Edward Zigler, one of the early leaders of Head Start, has asserted that "[t]he difficulty in evaluating the Head Start program stems largely from the fact that its goals were originally presented rather vaguely." Zigler and Trickett, I.Q., *Social Competence, and Evaluation of Early Childhood Intervention*, 33 Am. Psychologist 789, 790 (1978).

Head Start program; communities are required to contribute the remaining 20% in cash or donated services.

Head Start's current budget reflects almost continuous growth since the program's inception.<sup>4</sup> The Head Start budget for the initial summer program was \$198.9 million in fiscal year (FY) 1966 and \$349.2 million the next year. By 1978, the budget had grown to \$625 million for full-year services to 391,000 children.<sup>5</sup> Seven years later, in FY 1985, Head Start was spending \$1.075 billion on 452,000 children.<sup>6</sup> These budget increases, although not adjusted for inflation, reflect improvements in program quality, as well as a small expansion in enrollment and an extension of the program from an eight-week summer effort to a full-year program. Head Start has earmarked budget increases in recent years for reducing the child-staff ratio in Head Start classrooms, for increasing the capacity of projects to hire and retain qualified and experienced staff, and for maintaining appropriate physical facilities.

The Head Start program is currently authorized by the Omnibus Human Services Authorization Act of 1986, which was signed by President Reagan on September 30, 1986.<sup>7</sup>

## *II. Funding for Social Programs: Head Start's Survival in Context*

Commentators across the political spectrum have agreed on one thing: Head Start makes a difference. In the late 1970s, it was labeled the "most popular of the Great Society inventions."<sup>8</sup> On Head Start's fifteenth anniversary in 1980, a blue-ribbon panel of experts, charged by President Jimmy Carter with evaluating the program's history and future, praised its overall success and recommended expansion of its services.<sup>9</sup> Longitudinal studies<sup>10</sup> show that Head Start's success in achieving a range of long-term gains is suffi-

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4. The only period in which Head Start saw its budget decline in absolute dollars—undoubtedly as a result of the Westinghouse Report, *supra* note 2—was 1968-71, when funding dropped from \$652 million to \$369 million. Admin. for Children, Youth & Families, U.S. Dep't of Health & Human Services, Project Head Start Statistical Fact Sheet 2 (Dec. 1985).

5. *Id.* at 3.

6. *Id.*

7. Pub. L. 99-425, 100 Stat. 966.

8. M. Bane, *Here to Stay* 126 (1976).

9. See Head Start Bureau, Admin. for Children, Youth & Families, U.S. Dep't of Health & Human Services, *Head Start in the 1980s: Review and Recommendations, A Report Requested by the President of the U.S.* (Sept. 1980) [hereinafter *Head Start in the 1980s*].

10. See, e.g., J. Berrueta-Clement, L. Schweinhart, W. Barnett, A. Epstein & D. Weikart, *Changed Lives* (1984).

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cient to satisfy even the most exacting economist that Head Start is a "good buy." President Ronald Reagan, no fan of federal spending, has declared his support for Head Start because he believes that it is a truly successful federal program.<sup>11</sup>

Yet measurable success has been inadequate to protect a variety of other social programs from drastic budget cuts; programs directed at children and youth are no exception. Every dollar spent on the Job Corps, for example, brings a return of \$1.46 to society,<sup>12</sup> but the Reagan Administration has proposed ending this program. The special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children [WIC] provides more than a \$3.00 return on each dollar invested in it.<sup>13</sup> Although WIC has contributed significantly to reducing infant mortality and premature delivery and to increasing birthweight,<sup>14</sup> the Reagan Administration has repeatedly suggested cuts in its budget.

One would need a very short memory, in fact, to forget the myriad of programs for the young that in recent history have been soundly defeated, dramatically reduced, or quietly relegated to a list of unaffordables. Only a curmudgeon of the highest order openly expresses disdain for children or a lack of concern for their health and well-being. But in translating admirable sentiment for children into actual services, Americans in the last 20 years have communicated a mixed message on the appropriate role and responsibilities of the federal government in child and family policy.

Within a month of his inauguration in 1969, for example, President Richard M. Nixon called for a "national commitment to providing all American children an opportunity for healthful and stimulating development during the first five years of life."<sup>15</sup> Yet two years later, the President vetoed the Comprehensive Child Development Act of 1971, which would have provided funds for child and family services, including day care. In his veto message, Nixon warned that "for the Federal Government to plunge headlong financially into supporting child development would commit the vast moral authority of the National Government to the side of communal approaches to child rearing over [and] against the family-cen-

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11. Richmond & Kotelchuck, *Commentary on Changed Lives*, in *id.* at 204, 209.

12. Staff of House Select Comm. on Children, Youth and Families, *Opportunities for Success: Cost-Effective Programs for Children*, 97th Cong., 1st Sess., 31 (1985).

13. *Id.* at 5.

14. Edelman & Weill, *Investing in Our Children*, 4 Yale L. & Pol'y Rev. 331, 359 n.140 (1986) (citing to Institute of Medicine, *Preventing Low Birthweight* (1985)).

15. President's Message on Reorganization of the War on Poverty, Cong. Q. Almanac 34-A (Feb. 19, 1969).

tered approach.”<sup>16</sup> What some called the collectivization of child rearing, President Nixon implied, could lead to the demise of the family.

The next comprehensive proposal for a new federal program for children and families, the Child and Family Services bill of 1975, fared no better.<sup>17</sup> The bill was defeated in Congress after an organized mail campaign charged that federally funded day care would destroy the American family.<sup>18</sup> According to one commentator, the orchestrated effort to fight the perceived government takeover of child rearing “produced more letters to Congress than any recent issue including Vietnam.”<sup>19</sup>

Many other proposals of the 1970s to create new categorical programs or expand existing efforts also met with failure. And although most existing programs remained intact during this period, the next decade brought a full-scale frontal assault on these efforts as well. Systematic reductions in funding in the 1980s have been accompanied by efforts to eliminate or consolidate human service programming.

In 1981, President Reagan presented dramatic budget cuts in his first submission to Congress. Marching under the banner of the New Federalism, the Administration also proposed the consolidation of 83 categorical programs into seven state block grants.<sup>20</sup> The Reagan proposals were intended to end the overall domestic growth of a federal government that had been spending at an accelerating pace for the past 20 years.<sup>21</sup> The Reagan block grant proposals were linked to the Administration’s drive to reduce federal spending for domestic programs and to return decision-making authority to the states.

The first and critical step in achieving the President’s proposed budget cuts and program consolidations was the passage in July

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16. President’s Message to the Senate Returning S. 2007 Without His Approval, 7 Weekly Comp. Pres. Doc. 1634 (Dec. 9, 1971).

17. The Child and Family Services Act of 1974: Joint Hearings on S. 3754 Before the Subcomm. on Children & Youth, the Subcomm. on Empl., Poverty & Migratory Labor, and the House Educ. & Labor Comm. Select Subcomm. on Educ., 94th Cong., 1st Sess. (1975).

18. J. Levine, *Day Care and the Public Schools* 125 (1978).

19. *Id.*

20. See President Ronald Reagan’s State of the Union Address, *quoted in* N.Y. Times, Feb. 19, 1981, at A1, col. 6.

21. The number of federal categorical programs had proliferated from 40 in 1959, costing \$6.7 billion annually, to 492 in 1980, costing more than \$90 million annually. Off. of Management and Budget, Exec. Off. of the President, Major Themes and Additional Budget Details, Fiscal Year 1983, at 18 [hereinafter Major Themes and Additional Budget Details, Fiscal Year 1983].

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1981 of the White House-backed Gramm-Latta budget substitute.<sup>22</sup> By compressing a series of massive budget cuts into a single bill and by pushing for a speedy resolution, the Republican leadership in Congress successfully diffused opposition from many of the interest groups affected by the cuts. Adopting the overarching budget targets, however, was only the beginning of the process. The next steps were taken by the Congressional authorizing committees, which were directed to “reconcile” the programs under their jurisdiction with the target sums in the budget approved by Congress. The reconciliation process merged substantial revisions in an estimated 250 different programs into a single, enormous piece of legislation. Total outlay reduction between FY 1982 and FY 1984 amounted to \$130 billion in domestic programs.<sup>23</sup> Congress elected to fold 57 grant programs into nine block grants.<sup>24</sup>

In its first year, the social services block grant represented a 20% cut in the current services budget. The community services block grant abolished the federal Community Services Administration and cut funding for community service programs by 37%. The block grant consolidation effort granted more managerial authority to the states and reduced financial resources available from the federal government. The block grant allocations exposed these social programs to ever-increasing competition at the state level for a piece of a new—and smaller—pie.

The 1981 block grant legislation hit a number of major programs for children, including Maternal and Child Health, Title XX Day Care, and services for disabled children. Budget-cutting legislation slashed scores of other programs for children and families. Head Start, in fact, was the only discretionary social program protected from current services cuts in President Reagan’s first budget for the Department of Health and Human Services. The Head Start program, despite an estimated average cost of nearly \$3000 per child, was considered part of the federal “safety net.”

Head Start’s survival is directly attributable to its unique position in the human services delivery system. Categorical programs, in general, have been condemned for being narrow and single-minded in focus. The traditional view of such programs is that this categorization creates artificial and counterproductive boundaries between

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22. N.Y. Times, July 30, 1981, at A1, col. 6.

23. Major Themes and Additional Budget Details, Fiscal Year 1983, *supra* note 21, at 11.

24. N.Y. Times, Sept. 21, 1981, at A1, col. 2.

activities.<sup>25</sup> While Head Start is a categorical delivery program, it has managed to avoid such rigid compartmentalization. The program serves various groups—children, families, and communities; offers a wide range of services—education, health promotion and accident and disease prevention, and vocational training; and functions at both the federal and local levels. In this diversity lies its strength.

The examination of the program's history and current operation that follows illustrates how Head Start has succeeded in deflecting political criticism without relinquishing its commitment to its earliest goals.

### *III. Great Society Origins*

Head Start was established as one item on the sweeping agenda known as the Great Society. President Lyndon B. Johnson declared in his 1964 State of the Union message, "Unfortunately, many Americans live on the outskirts of hope—some because of their poverty, some because of their color, and all too many because of both. Our task is to help replace destiny with opportunity."<sup>26</sup> Head Start was to replace the expectation of poverty with one of hope for millions of American children and their families. The unbridled idealism of the time was reflected in President Johnson's confident remarks about the 560,000 children in Head Start's initial summer program: "Thirty million man-years—the combined life span of these youngsters—will be spent productively and rewardingly, rather than wasted in tax-supported institutions or in welfare-supported lethargy."<sup>27</sup>

In 1964, President Johnson had asked a panel of child development experts, chaired by Dr. Robert E. Cooke, then pediatrician-in-chief at The Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, to design a national program to help communities overcome the handicaps faced by their disadvantaged preschool children.<sup>28</sup> A comprehen-

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25. See generally N. Hobbs, *The Futures of Children: Categories, Labels, & Their Consequences*, Report of the Project on Classification of Exceptional Children (1975).

26. President Lyndon B. Johnson's State of the Union Address, *quoted in* N.Y. Times, Jan. 9, 1964, at A16, col. 1.

27. Zigler & Berman, *Discerning the Future of Early Childhood Intervention*, 38 *Am. Psychologist* 894, 898 (1983).

28. As recently as 1979, Robert Cooke himself described the perception in 1964 that a program was needed "to interrupt the cycle of poverty, the nearly inevitable sequence of poor parenting which leads to children with social and intellectual deficits, which in turn leads to poor school performance, joblessness, and poverty, leading again to high risk births, inappropriate parenting, and so continues the cycle." Cooke, *Introduction: The Theoretical Basis for the Program*, in *Project Head Start: A Legacy of the War on*

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sive preschool program, for children of any socioeconomic group, was a revolutionary idea at the time. The Cooke advisory panel, in a report that became the blueprint for Project Head Start, submitted its recommendations in February of 1965 to Sargent Shriver, then-director of President Johnson's War on Poverty.

On May 18, 1965, President Johnson announced the new eight-week summer program, to be administered by the Office of Economic Opportunity.<sup>29</sup> Initially, Project Head Start was to serve 375,000 children. Later that same summer, the President enthusiastically declared plans to expand the eight-week effort to serve almost 560,000 preschoolers at 13,400 Head Start centers in 2,500 communities.

The Cooke advisory panel set forth the objectives of the Head Start program in 1965:

- (1) To improve the child's physical health and physical abilities.
- (2) To help the emotional and social development of the child by encouraging self-confidence, spontaneity, curiosity, and self-discipline.
- (3) To improve the child's mental processes and skills with particular attention to conceptual and verbal skills.
- (4) To establish patterns and expectations of success for the child which create a climate of confidence for his or her future learning efforts.
- (5) To increase the child's capacity to relate positively to family members and others while at the same time strengthening the family's ability to relate positively to the child and his or her problems.
- (6) To develop in the child and his or her family a responsible attitude toward society, and to foster constructive opportunities for society to work together with the poor in solving their problems.<sup>30</sup>

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Poverty xxiii (E. Zigler & J. Valentine eds. 1979) [hereinafter Project Head Start]. The Great Society initiatives were then in the earliest stages of their creation. Head Start, as it was later named, was to be a central feature of the Great Society.

29. Project Head Start began as a national demonstration program authorized under the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 to provide comprehensive developmental services for low-income preschool children and their families. The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, Pub. L. 88-452, 78 Stat. 508, 42 U.S.C. §§ 2701-2996 (1982), an anti-poverty law, authorized the Community Action Program, which included Head Start. The Economic Opportunity Amendments of 1966, Pub. L. 89-794, 80 Stat. 1462-3, 42 U.S.C. §§ 2792-2793 (1982), made Head Start an explicit part of the Act and also provided for the delivery of comprehensive health services.

30. This somewhat more paternalistic goal was the only one of the original seven not included in Head Start's stated objectives in 1975. See Head Start Program Performance Standards of 1975 (on file with the Dep't of Health & Human Services).



- (7) To increase the sense of dignity and self-worth within the child and his or her family.<sup>31</sup>

#### *IV. Evolution and Operation of the Program*

Head Start retains these broad objectives today, objectives which encompass the interrelated aspects of cognitive and intellectual development, physical and mental health, and nutritional and social needs. The program's approach has been predicated on a comprehensive, interdisciplinary array of services and on the involvement of the families of the children enrolled in Head Start. The family, which the program views as the principal influence on the child's development, is a direct participant in the program.

Five major elements of the Head Start program—(1) education, (2) comprehensive health and social services, (3) family involvement, (4) research and demonstration, and (5) local control—are described in detail below. Their interrelationships, as well as their independent operations within Head Start, illustrate how the program's noncategorical approach has contributed to its survival.

##### *A. Education*

In 1965, the year Head Start was conceived, James Coleman was completing his historic study showing the influence of children's social, economic, educational, and cultural background on school performance.<sup>32</sup> When Head Start was launched, it was popularly perceived as a program directed solely at school readiness and at the improvement of intelligence scores for children from deprived backgrounds. The program's name itself described the kind of help it provided to disadvantaged children: "a head start." Although only one of the seven objectives listed by the Cooke advisory panel in 1965 concerned the child's academic skills,<sup>33</sup> Head Start was commonly thought of as a pre-academic program.<sup>34</sup> At Head Start's

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31. Memorandum from Robert Cooke to Sargent Shriver, Improving the Opportunities and Achievements of the Children of the Poor (Feb. 1965) (the goals are not numbered in the original, a copy of which is on file with the author).

32. See generally J. Coleman, *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (1966). One major conclusion of the Coleman report was that children's school performance improves dramatically when they have more control over their lives. *Id.* at 45. The strong parental participation component of Head Start was designed to contribute to the families' sense of control and self-determination.

33. See *supra* note 31.

34. Before Head Start, a preschool education was the exception rather than the rule. In Virginia and Arkansas, for example, local school boards were not permitted to use state funds to serve anyone under the compulsory grade school age. Today early childhood education is the norm.

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founding in 1965, some even dreamed that preschool education for poor children in an eight-week summer program would actually enhance their intelligence.<sup>35</sup> The hopes and promises of 1965 had received support from preliminary studies showing that experimental preschool programs were in fact raising IQs.<sup>36</sup>

The first leaders of Head Start now acknowledge that they themselves may have fostered the public perception of the program as solely aimed at improving academic skills. IQ scores were used often in the early days to assess the success of the program.<sup>37</sup> But-tressed in fact by indicators of dramatic improvements in IQ,<sup>38</sup> Head Start was quick to accept praise for early and tentative reports of cognitive gains.<sup>39</sup>

When less favorable findings on Head Start's contribution to educational development appeared in a highly publicized report by the Westinghouse Learning Corporation in 1969,<sup>40</sup> however, Head Start supporters scrambled for other measures of success. The Westinghouse Report, using IQ scores as a gauge of effectiveness, concluded that the initial gains of Head Start children over a control group of non-Head Start children faded after two or three years in elementary school.<sup>41</sup> Supporters of Head Start were temporarily

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35. Zigler & Anderson, *An Idea Whose Time Had Come*, in *Project Head Start*, *supra* note 28, at 13.

36. *Id.* at 10-11.

37. Richmond, Stipek & Zigler, *A Decade of Head Start*, in *id.* at 135, 139.

38. For example, Eisenberg and Connors reported a 10-point increase in IQ for graduates of the first eight-week Head Start summer program. Zigler & Trickett, *supra* note 3, at 791 (citing to Eisenberg & Connors, *The Effect of Head Start on the Developmental Process* (paper presented at the 1966 Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Found. Scientific Symposium on Mental Retardation, Boston, Mass., Apr. 11, 1966)).

39. "Whereas a few intervention programs were explicitly designed as attempts to raise IQs, Head Start was mounted with the much broader goal of improving social competence—a concept that includes but is not limited to cognitive functioning. Yet the first evaluation of this and other projects focused on IQ scores and titillated workers with reports of hefty IQ gains after only a few weeks of intervention. Those with an interest in Head Start thus allowed it to be assessed in terms of changes in IQ test performance. This was a near fatal mistake . . ." Zigler & Berman, *supra* note 27, at 896.

40. "[T]he Head Start children can not be said to be *appreciably* different from their peers in elementary grades who did not attend Head Start in most aspects of cognitive and affective development measured in this study." Westinghouse Report, *supra* note 2, at 5 (emphasis in original).

41. The year 1969 also saw the publication of a controversial monography by Arthur Jensen declaring that "compensatory education has been tried and it apparently has failed." Jensen, *How Much Can We Boost IQ and Scholastic Achievement?*, in *Environment, Heredity, and Intelligence I* (collected articles from the Harv. Educ. Rev.) (1969).

stunned by the study,<sup>42</sup> but they recovered rapidly, launching a series of attacks on the methodology employed by Westinghouse.<sup>43</sup>

More significantly, the Head Start leadership quickly assured Congress and the public that the program was achieving gains in other areas<sup>44</sup> and further emphasized that it had never been intended to be a program dedicated solely to educational development.<sup>45</sup> When a 1970 report by Kirschner Associates concluded that by "pragmatic, quiet actions rather than by violent confrontation," Head Start had achieved its goal of making local institutions more responsive to the poor,<sup>46</sup> Head Start leaders capitalized on its results. Edward Zigler, then director of the Office of Child Development,<sup>47</sup> hailed the Kirschner study as "a moving document . . . momentous . . . one of the most important social evaluations of the last ten years."<sup>48</sup>

Nineteen sixty-nine may well have been the year in which Head Start leaders learned that perception often matters as much as reality. And for them, the year 1970, to paraphrase James Madison, would see early error become parent to its own remedy. Never again would an informed advocate for Head Start characterize the program solely in terms of its potential for long-term cognitive

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42. Zigler has since referred to the Westinghouse Report as "a specific instance in which a poor evaluation came very close to causing our nation to jettison the most popular and highly regarded program ever mounted for children in America." Zigler and Trickett, *supra* note 3, at 794.

43. See, e.g., Smith & Bissell, *supra* note 2; White, *The National Impact of Head Start*, in 3 *Disadvantaged Child* 163 (J. Hellmuth ed. 1970).

44. Even within the area of education, however, evaluators had begun to look beyond IQ to school readiness, social competency, grade retention (i.e., those students left back), assignment to special education classes, and school dropout rates as measures of academic achievement. See, e.g., Admin. for Children, Youth & Families, U.S. Dep't of Health & Human Services, Summary Report: Lasting Effects After Preschool (DHEW Pub. No. (OHDS) 80-30179) (Oct. 1979). Furthermore, the Head Start program evaluated by Westinghouse was the eight-week program abandoned in the early 1970s for a full academic year (i.e., eight-month) schedule.

45. Head Start was administratively located in the Office of Economic Opportunity [OEO], an antipoverty agency, until 1969, when it was moved to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare [HEW], now the Department of Health and Human Services [HHS].

46. Kirschner Assocs., Inc., *A National Survey of the Impact of Head Start Centers on Community Institutions* (prepared for Project Head Start, Off. of Child Dev., Dep't of Health, Educ. & Welfare) (May 1970).

47. Zigler, a well-known expert in child development rather than a specialist in education, was a powerful influence in the early days of OCD. This newly created agency, which housed the Head Start program at the time, became the Administration for Children, Youth & Families [ACYF] in the late 1970s.

48. G. Steiner, *The Children's Cause* 35 (1976) (quoting remarks of Edward Zigler at a press conference, June 26, 1970).

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gains or intellectual enhancement. Head Start's leaders would in the future describe it as a *comprehensive, multiservice* program.

In the late 1970s, concern resurfaced about the possible restriction of Head Start's activities to educational programs. The successful 1978 battle to keep Head Start out of the new Department of Education clearly demonstrated the continuing conviction of Head Start supporters that placing it within that department would tend to narrow the program's focus at the expense of its other services. In addition, Head Start advocates were concerned that if the program were enveloped by the Department of Education, its funding would be channeled through educational agencies rather than through community action groups and local nonprofit corporations. As a result, it was feared, community control would be sacrificed.<sup>49</sup>

Head Start's current educational activities continue to extend beyond traditional academic aims. The focus on education is integrated with other elements of Head Start; the overall effort is designed to promote the child's self-reliance and self-esteem. Children are encouraged to solve problems, to initiate activities, and to learn by exploration and inquiry. The Head Start education component addresses the individual needs of each child as well as the special needs of children from different backgrounds. The program involves parents in the child's education in the classroom and in the home; it also works closely with public school systems to ease the child's transition beyond Head Start.

Research and evaluative studies completed in the last decade show that Head Start graduates demonstrate improved performance in the classroom. The evaluations also indicate that Head Start participants, over the long term, suffer fewer grade retentions and require fewer special education class placements than do control groups of non-Head Start graduates.<sup>50</sup>

### *B. Children with Special Needs*

Head Start's educational efforts serve thousands of children from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In 1985, 68% of its enrollment consisted of black (40%), Hispanic (21%), Asian (3%) and

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49. For a summary of the debate surrounding the proposal to place Head Start in the Department of Education, see *Hearings on Department of Education Act Before the Senate Comm. on Governmental Affairs*, 95th Cong., 2nd Sess. (1978).

50. See, e.g., Darlington, Royce, Snipper, Murray & Lazar, *Preschool Programs and Later School Competence of Children from Low Income Families*, 208 Science 202-04 (1980).

Native-American children (4%).<sup>51</sup> Head Start's Indian and Migrant Program serves 14,000 Indian and 18,400 migrant children.<sup>52</sup>

Special emphasis has been placed on serving Spanish-speaking and other bilingual and bicultural children. Efforts by Head Start to address the needs of these children and their families have included:

- The development of curriculum materials for local projects to provide instruction in both English and Spanish.
- The provision of special training to classroom staff who teach bilingual children.
- The establishment of a National Bilingual-Multicultural Resources Network among programs with high concentrations of Spanish-speaking children.<sup>53</sup>
- Research focusing on Spanish-speaking children, including assessments of the environmental factors influencing their development.

The handicapped, another group of children with special needs, have also been targeted by Head Start. Head Start legislation mandates that no fewer than 10% of the total number of enrollment opportunities in Head Start programs in each State be made available for handicapped children.<sup>54</sup> In response to this mandate, Head Start served 61,900 handicapped children, about 12.2% of its total enrollment, in full-year programs in FY 1985.<sup>55</sup>

Head Start provides handicapped preschool children with the opportunity to be in a "mainstream" developmental setting with non-handicapped children. In 1984, 98.6% of all Head Start programs had enrolled at least one handicapped child, making Head Start the largest child development program in the country serving preschool handicapped children in a mainstream setting.<sup>56</sup>

A major evaluation of Head Start's mainstreaming policy found that its handicapped children, unlike those in other programs, were

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51. Project Head Start Statistical Fact Sheet, *supra* note 4, at 1.

52. Telephone interview with Clennie Murphy, Associate Director, Head Start Bureau (July 17, 1986).

53. The National Bilingual-Multicultural Resources Network provides and shares access to bilingual and bicultural materials and aids in implementing curriculum models.

54. Head Start Act, 42 U.S.C. § 9835(d) (1982). The Head Start Act adopts the definition of handicapped children provided in the Education of the Handicapped Act, as amended, 20 U.S.C. § 1401(1) (1982) as those who are "mentally retarded, hard of hearing, deaf, speech impaired, visually handicapped, seriously emotionally disturbed, orthopedically impaired, or other health-impaired children or children with specific learning disabilities who by reason thereof require special education and related services."

55. Head Start Bureau, Admin. for Children, Youth & Families, U.S. Dep't of Health & Human Services, Twelfth Annual Report of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Provided to Handicapped Children in Project Head Start 14 (1985) [hereinafter Twelfth Annual Report].

56. *Id.* at 7.

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almost universally served with their non-handicapped peers. Head Start children showed improvement in physical, self-help, social, and academic skills. Gains of six months in communication age were recorded for speech-impaired children beyond the levels attained by those handicapped children who did not attend any preschool.<sup>57</sup>

In addition to educating handicapped children in a mainstream setting, Head Start provides special education and support services to meet the individual needs of the child and his or her family. In the 1984-85 operating year, 93% of the Head Start programs for handicapped children provided parents with counseling, information about their child's handicap, training to help parents work with the child at home, and assistance in securing medical services.<sup>58</sup>

### *C. Comprehensive Health and Social Services*

From the outset, Head Start has offered health, nutrition, and social welfare information and services for all participating children and their families. The Head Start health component emphasizes the prevention<sup>59</sup> of childhood illness as well as treatment and rehabilitation. Head Start also works with parents to ensure links to community health resources so that the child and family continue to receive comprehensive health care after leaving the Head Start program.

Through an interagency agreement between the Head Start Bureau and the Office of Child Health in the Health Care Financing Administration, as well as through agreements at the state and local levels, Head Start seeks to maximize the use of community health resources. Recent data show, for example, that 47% of Head Start children are enrolled in the Medicaid/Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment [EPSDT] program, which pays for medical and dental screening and treatment.<sup>60</sup>

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57. Applied Management Sciences, *Evaluation of the Process of Mainstreaming Handicapped Children into Project Head Start*, Silver Spring, Md. (1978).

58. Twelfth Annual Report, *supra* note 55, at 22.

59. In April 1977, President Jimmy Carter and HEW Secretary Joseph Califano declared a national campaign to improve immunization levels for all children under the age of 15. Secretary Califano specifically directed the Head Start Bureau to set measurable objectives for ensuring the delivery of services. Childhood immunization became one of the highest priorities in Head Start.

60. EPSDT, a program initiated in 1967, requires that all children who are enrolled in Medicaid be screened periodically during early childhood. The health of each child is assessed and appropriate referrals are made for treatment if needed.

Head Start also has developed interagency agreements to provide dental consultation and services, training, and technical assistance to local Head Start programs. These agreements also emphasize working with state Medicaid agencies to increase use of the EPSDT program.

All Head Start programs provide food services to help meet the child's nutritional needs. Full-day programs offer lunch, snacks, and other meals that provide one-half to two-thirds of the child's daily nutritional needs; children in part-time programs receive meals that provide at least one-third of their daily nutritional requirements. In addition, all Head Start programs provide parents with information and education in the selection and preparation of foods to meet family nutritional needs and budgets.

Every Head Start project also has a social services program to link Head Start families with community services and resources. The social services staff works with families to encourage, motivate, and assist them in their efforts to improve the conditions and quality of family life and to facilitate the appropriate use of community services and resources. Data from the 1984-85 Head Start Performance Indicators, which measure the performance of Head Start programs in key areas, show that Head Start provides 97% of its families with social services either directly or through referral to other agencies.<sup>61</sup> Such community agencies and resources include food stamps, public health clinics, family planning, welfare departments, legal aid, public housing assistance, state employment offices, and job training programs.

#### *D. Family Involvement*

Before the passage of the bill that created Head Start in 1965, the traditional acceptance of biology as the prime determinant of achievement had begun to give way to a faith in protective care of the child by those outside the home, including the removal of impediments to growth. Head Start was the first legislative statement addressing the developmental needs of the child and representing a step beyond custodial care.

The "quick fix" approach of the 1960s gave way to the holistic atmosphere of the 1970s. As the first Earth Day in 1970 educated the public about ecology, child and family advocates expressed their

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61. Telephone interview with Clennie Murphy, *supra* note 52.

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own concerns about environment—the environment in which American children were being raised and nurtured.<sup>62</sup>

Walter Mondale, then a Democratic Senator from Minnesota and Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Children and Youth, held a series of hearings in 1973 examining the influence that governmental policies had on American families. As a result of these hearings, Mondale, using the Environmental Impact Statement as a model,<sup>63</sup> called for the adoption of a federal Family Impact Statement requirement designed to identify the effects of governmental programs on family life.<sup>64</sup> By 1976, presidential candidate Jimmy Carter was hailing the family as “the cornerstone of American life,” and promising to convene a White House Conference on Families.<sup>65</sup> Once elected, President Carter ordered the conference, the main purpose of which was to “examine the important effects that the world of work, the mass media, the court system, private institutions, and other major facets of our society have on American families.”<sup>66</sup> In addressing the White House Conference on Families in 1980, President Carter continued to sound the theme of the family as the centerpiece of individual and social development. “The care and nurture of the young is central to any society, and that has always been the special responsibility of the family,” Carter asserted, adding:

It is here that the motivation, morals, goals and habits are first set. In family life, we find many of the roots of crime and failure and even some health problems—and also the roots of good habits, achieve-

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62. By the 1970s, changes taking place in American family life included a dramatic increase in the proportion of mothers working outside the home, striking changes in family structure, rapid growth in residential mobility, and a startling rise in the national divorce rate.

63. In 1969, Congress passed the National Environmental Policy Act, codified at 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321-4347 (1982), which, *inter alia*, required government agencies to prepare Environmental Impact Statements before taking any major federal actions that might significantly affect environmental quality. The Statement had to identify the impact of the proposed activity, discuss thoroughly its possible adverse effects, and consider alternatives to the proposed action. 42 U.S.C. § 4332(1)(c) (1982).

64. Mondale, A “Family Impact Statement:” A Response from the U.S. Senate, 83 Sch. Rev. 11, 14 (Nov. 1974). Although his proposal was never enacted into law, Mondale later observed that the more he studied problems affecting children, the more he became convinced that he should be focusing on the condition of their families. Address by Walter F. Mondale, HEW Distinguished Speakers Luncheon (Sept. 28, 1977). President Reagan recently has ordered family impact analyses for federal programs and agencies. See Exec. Order No. 12606, 52 Fed. Reg. 34188 (1987).

65. Address by Jimmy Carter, National Conference of Catholic Charities, Denver, Colorado (Oct. 4, 1976).

66. White House Conference on Families, Dep’t of Health, Educ. & Welfare, White House Conference on Families Fact Sheet 1 (July 1978) (quoting President Carter’s announcement of the Conference on Jan. 30, 1978).



ment, happiness and concern for others. I hope we will come out of this conference with a reaffirmation of families as the fundamental building blocks of our society.<sup>67</sup>

The "family policy" idea had become a rallying cry, and not just for child advocates.

The popularity of federal family policy had another effect: fostering the slow recognition of the American public that increasing numbers of women in the workforce needed alternative child care services. Although Head Start—which served children in a limited age group on an only part-time basis—had never considered itself a day care program, it was soon dubbed a model for developmental child care.<sup>68</sup> Even the limited day care provided by Head Start aided in "enlisting child development groups on the side of day care expansion"<sup>69</sup> and providing a developmental thrust to the older concept of custodial care. When the public response to nationalized day care proposals began to build into condemnation of an intrusive federal government, however, Head Start administrators emphasized that the program's role was much larger than simply that of child care provider.

Head Start, of course, had always devoted attention to families. An emphasis on parental involvement had been an integral part of the program since its first days in the Office of Economic Opportunity. For Head Start leaders, the family focus of the mid-1970s was much more of a change of perception than of reality. President Carter, after all, had called for a White House Conference on the American family in 1976; his Vice President, Walter Mondale, while in Congress, had been a great advocate of children's programs and family-focused policymaking. The Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, under whose umbrella fell the Office of Child Development (and within it, the Head Start Bureau), was Joseph Califano, a dedicated supporter of Head Start who had also championed family policy as an adviser to candidate Carter during the 1976 presidential campaign. Early in the Carter Administration, Head Start's parent organization, the Office of Child Development, was renamed the Administration for Children, Youth and Families. The President would later call for the creation of a new Office for Families, also to be housed in ACYF. During this same period, members of the 95th

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67. President's Address to the White House Conference on Families, Office of the White House Press Secretary (June 5, 1980).

68. See generally M. Keyserling, *Windows on Day Care* (1972).

69. Steiner, *Reform Follows Reality: The Growth of Welfare*, in *The Great Society: Lessons for the Future* 61 (E. Ginzburg & R. Solow eds. 1974).

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Congress were offering a series of legislative proposals relating to families, including proposals and hearings on teenage pregnancy, adoption, long-term foster care, “displaced homemakers,” day care, runaway youth, spouse abuse, and child abuse. Head Start, with its emphasis on parental participation and attention to all family members, not just to the child in the classroom, readily served as a model program.

The national attention to family concerns in the 1970s, however, also resulted in highly politicized controversy. Opponents criticized such efforts as the White House Conference on Families as attempts by “secular humanists” to weaken traditional families; proponents heralded the diversity and pluralism of American family life. New Right critics condemned governmental intrusion; traditional liberals welcomed federal support. The common area of agreement, however, was the importance of families. No one disputed that strong families made for a strong society. By emphasizing parental involvement and the central role of families in managing its community programs, Head Start was able to steer clear of the political divisiveness and to celebrate one of its natural strengths.

### *E. Research and Demonstration*

In the late 1970s, Head Start administrators capitalized on the growing interest in the family as a whole as well as on the diversity of the families served in the program by focusing public attention on Head Start’s efforts to involve parents in the direction of its local centers. They also publicized such projects as Education for Parenthood, Parent-Child Centers, Home Start, and a relatively new program, Exploring Parenting.<sup>70</sup>

These four projects were the outgrowth of Head Start’s major research and demonstration program, which was designed to develop and test new ideas that might lead to program and service delivery improvements in Head Start, in schools, and in other programs targeted at young children and their families. Through its research and demonstration arm, Head Start continually “markets” successful new approaches for use by local Head Start projects across the country and shares them with other institutions providing child development services.

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70. Exploring Parenting, a curriculum program, was developed as part of an effort to involve, inform, and assist parents. Parents are invited to attend a series of two-hour sessions that focuses on parents, families, and the community and on the nature of family relationships under the stresses of daily life.

Home Start, for example, is a home-based demonstration program providing Head Start-type comprehensive services to low income families with three- to five-year-old children.<sup>71</sup> Parent-Child Centers, first funded in 1968, provide an array of services to low-income families with at least one child under the age of three. The Centers are designed to increase family participation in the community and to strengthen parental and family confidence and competence.

*F. Local Control*

In the 1980s, opponents of a strong national presence in domestic affairs have gained national attention by accusing federal programs of fostering the disintegration of the American family. For example, a Presidential Task Force released a preliminary report in November 1986 charging that the American family had been harmed by "the abrasive experiments of two liberal decades."<sup>72</sup> The group called for an end to federal intervention into family affairs<sup>73</sup> and cited many federal programs that affected—destructively, in the panel's view—family life. It is significant that not a word of criticism was levelled at Head Start.

Head Start consistently has been able to show the importance of local involvement in its program by emphasizing parental control of neighborhood centers. Rather than accusing Head Start of interfering in family life, many New Right commentators have applauded Head Start's work in changing the context in which families live. They note that the Head Start program relies on community volunteers, and point out that nearly one-third of the more than 70,000 people it employs are parents of current or former Head Start children. They see that Head Start has provided thousands of low-income individuals with the training necessary to receive the Child Development Associate [CDA] credential, training designed to up-

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71. As a result of evaluations of the Home Start pilot program, which received funding from 1972 to 1975, ACYF introduced a home-based option into the Head Start program. In 1978, over 12,000 children were served at home. U.S. Gen. Acct. Off., The Comptroller General, Report to the Congress of the U.S.: Early Childhood and Family Development Programs Improve the Quality of Life for Low-Income Families (Feb. 6, 1979) [hereinafter Comptroller General's Report].

72. U.S. Dep't of Educ., *The Family: Preserving America's Future* 8 (Nov. 1986).

73. The Associated Press reported that the Presidential Task Force Report "charges that the fabric of American family life has been torn by two decades of liberal social experiment . . . [and suggests] that the government can best help families by interfering in their lives as little as possible." Christopher Connell, A.P. Wire, Nov. 13, 1986, 10 a.m., Washington, D.C.

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grade the knowledge and experience of the classroom staff.<sup>74</sup> They find that Head Start encourages parental involvement in public schools and assists parents in finding health and social delivery services in their communities.

Parents are encouraged to become involved in all aspects of the program's operations and decision-making; to participate in classroom and other related activities as paid employees, as volunteers, or as observers; and to work closely with their own children.<sup>75</sup> Parental involvement is not limited to an advisory board of a few parents, but includes the active involvement of many. On the average, for every five children enrolled in Head Start, four parents provide volunteer services to the program. Nearly a third of all Head Start staff members are parents of current or former Head Start children.<sup>76</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The first Head Start children are by now in their mid-20s; scores of longitudinal analyses of their progress have demonstrated the program's effectiveness. The Comptroller General of the United States has reported that early childhood and family development programs, and Head Start in particular, have improved the quality of life for low-income families.<sup>77</sup> A recent study also found that, compared with their non-Head Start peers, Head Start "graduates" show a nearly double rate of employment and participation in college and vocational training programs and a halving of the rate of teenage pregnancy.<sup>78</sup>

Among the political explanations offered for Head Start's support is that the program has a powerful constituency in virtually every congressional district in the country. So, however, do social and health programs ranging from Title XX Day Care to Maternal and Child Health programs; this explanation alone cannot account for Head Start's success.

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74. Head Start also provides funds for the training of personnel and technical assistance for the development, conduct, and administration of its programs, as requested by state and community organizations and grantees.

75. 42 U.S.C. § 9837(b) (1982) requires, *inter alia*, that each Head Start agency establish procedures to allow parents and area residents to participate directly in decisions and to provide for the regular participation of parents in the administration of the program at the local level.

76. Reece, Head Start at 20, *Children Today* 7-8 (Mar.-Apr. 1985).

77. Comptroller General's Report, *supra* note 71.

78. *Changed Lives*, *supra* note 10.

Democratic Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York has offered another partial explanation for Head Start's ability to survive in the 1980s:

The younger conservative writers . . . found themselves in a conservative Washington . . . and began to ask how the State might advance a conservative vision of society. A young political scientist, Peter Skerry . . . rediscovered Head Start, or rather, observing that it had survived even in the early Reagan budget, asked why and discovered that the Head Start program that had actually evolved was not at all what liberals had planned, but, rather, many things that conservatives might very well have hoped for.<sup>79</sup>

Clearly, it could be argued that a federal program of early childhood intervention is hardly the ideal of a conservative administration anxious to reduce the federal domestic budget as well as to return bureaucratic authority to the states. Indeed, Head Start is a striking example of a rare federal program that completely bypasses state control, with funding and policy guidance flowing directly from the federal to local levels. Nevertheless, conservatives have found Head Start, as a federal program that promotes parental self-help, to be ideologically appealing. Unlike many Great Society programs, Head Start has never been seen as a handout. Its ability to garner the appreciation of those on all points on the political spectrum serves as yet another illustration of Head Start's remarkable capacity to suit the particular predisposition of each observer.

Head Start is a complex program with a host of accomplishments to which different critics give different priorities. There is no doubt that the goals of Head Start are complex. Experts acknowledge uncertainty as to whether Head Start is primarily an education program, an antipoverty program, or a family support program; whether child development is Head Start's principal purpose or whether children's services are an ancillary, although important, benefit of an adult employment program.<sup>80</sup> This article has argued that the design and the leadership of Head Start, ever since the Westinghouse Report posed an early threat to its survival, has effectively capitalized on a comprehensive multiservice approach.<sup>81</sup>

Head Start's initial premise was a departure from nineteenth-century views that the poor (and hence, their children) were themselves

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79. D. Moynihan, *Family and Nation* 115-16 (1986).

80. See, e.g., Head Start in the 1980s, *supra* note 9, at 23.

81. It is beyond the scope of this article to speculate whether in today's political and economic climate such a program could receive the critical approval necessary for its creation. For interesting accounts of the extraordinary forces that combined to launch Head Start, see articles collected in *Project Head Start*, *supra* note 28.

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to blame, through laziness or inferior genes for their lowly estate.<sup>82</sup> The founders of the Great Society launched a program of compensatory and preschool education rooted in a sincere commitment to redress the cultural and intellectual “deficits” of the poor. Head Start has always operated on the underlying assumption that children raised in poverty did not have the same opportunities for intellectual and social development as did children raised in more comfortable circumstances. Early enthusiasts optimistically expected dramatic transformations in school readiness and large increases in intelligence scores. It has been acknowledged that the broad goals of the Great Society included “overpromises based on high hopes and great expectations.”<sup>83</sup> After initial positive data on IQ gains, the conclusions of the Westinghouse Report were disheartening, but perhaps not surprisingly so. Head Start was wounded, but its injuries were not fatal and the program quickly recovered.

The 1970s brought a new interest in studying child development within the broader contexts of family and community. The interaction of environmental and institutional factors became the latest theoretical construct. Words like “family systems” and “empowerment” took on a new cachet. Some Head Start advocates began promoting the program as a comprehensive child care service that could meet the preschool day care needs of parents of poor children. Others focused on parental involvement in the program, emphasizing such components of Head Start as Education for Parenthood, the Parent Advisory Councils, and the Parent-Child Centers. Still others saw Head Start as a means of introducing families to their community network of health, nutritional, and social services.

In the 1980s, individual autonomy has become the new catchphrase. The multifaceted Head Start program can readily accommodate this interest, too, proudly displaying its opportunities for job training and vocational advancement for children, for their parents, and for their neighbors.

A cynic may here recall Pascal’s famous remark, “If you give people the trappings, they quickly embrace the faith.” But the Head

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82. To recall the deeply rooted beliefs of that era, one need only look to the words of Henry Ward Beecher, a popular minister of the period, who confidently proclaimed: “No man in this country suffers from poverty unless it be more than his own fault—unless it be his sin.” *Quoted in* K. Keniston, *All Our Children* 38 (1977).

83. Califano, *What the Great Society Did for America*, *Governance*: Harv. J. Pub. Pol. 1, 10 (Summer-Fall 1986).

Start program is not just another example of smoke and mirrors. Its accomplishments are real and impressive. Different questions bring forth different answers; as Head Start aptly illustrates, artificial labels poorly fit a complex reality.

As a result of Head Start's comprehensive nature, the program has survived and flourished even when certain of its component parts have come under attack. If Head Start is criticized for not achieving rapid educational progress, for example, it can be redescribed as a program for social readiness, parental involvement, or other goals toward which significant progress has been made. If one aspect of Head Start falls into partisan disfavor, the program's promoters can point with pride to other activities more appealing to the current sentiment.<sup>84</sup> In an era of active government, Head Start may be called a program of early childhood intervention; in a time of federalism, it may be viewed as a program for personal autonomy and local volunteerism.

For Head Start is not just one program, but a heterogeneous collection of programs directed at children, at families, and at communities. Head Start has deflected the challenges posed by its critics, dodging their occasional attacks by answering their deepest concerns. Head Start is a programmatic and political success. It is irrepressible; it is incomparable; and it deserves our continued support.

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84. "Different groups who may not join a general child-advocacy effort may coalesce around some issues affecting children because their interests are involved. So be it." G. Steiner, *The Children's Cause*, *supra* note 48, at 174.